

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

words. To avoid attracting notice and exciting anti-clerical feelings, none of her friars or priests, excepting Fra Santi, came with her. Besides Lisa and Giovanna di Capo, her only other companions appear to have been Neri and Stefano. When the last-named, in April or May, was obliged to return to Siena in obedience to his parents, his place was taken by Cristofano Guidini.¹

This is one of the few episodes in Catherine's life concerning which we have external contemporary (and, for once, hostile) evidence. "In this year," writes Marchionne Stefani, under 1377 (the Florentines, it will be remembered, began their new year on March 25), "it happened that there was in Florence a woman named Catherine, the daughter of Jacopo Benincasa, who, being held of most holy, pure, and good and chaste life, began to blame the opponents of the Church. Those who managed the Party welcomed her right gladly ; and among the others the chiefs in this affair were Niccolo Soderini, who had made a room for her in his house, in which she had sometimes stayed, Stoldo di Messer Bindo Altoviti, and Piero Canigiani; these were those who praised her to the skies. And it is true that she knew ecclesiastical matters, both by her natural talents and by what she had acquired, and she spoke and wrote very-well. Piero Canigiani, too, was having a habitation built for her up at the foot of San Giorgio, and was collecting money from all his faction, men and women, buying stone and wood, and bringing it up there. Either maliciously by her own will, or introduced by the instigation of these men, she was brought many times to the meetings of the Party, to declare that it was right to admonish, in order that they might take measures to stop the war. By those of the Party she was reputed a prophetess, and by the others a hypocrite and a bad woman ; and many things were said of her, by some for treachery, and

¹ Cf. Letter 298 (254), and the letter from Stefano, dated Siena, May 22 1378, to Neri di Landoccio, "Florenrie apud sanctum Georgium," in *Lettere del discepoli*, 9.